

Proverbs 6:30-35

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Proverbs 6:30-35 explains how the repercussions of betrayal are severe.

Throughout the first six chapters of Proverbs, Solomon condemns wickedness and temptation to the most severe degree, giving no excuse or sound reason for it. With this context in mind, verse 30 and on initially seems like a departure. *Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry* (vs 30). However, we will see that although everyone can sympathize with someone who *steals* because they are *hungry*, they still have to bear the consequences.

Notwithstanding our empathy for the actions of a desperate man, regardless that we have a certain amount of compassion for someone in this circumstance, *when he is found, he must repay sevenfold* (vs 31).

The repayment of *sevenfold* likely represents the notion of “fully.” Seven is often used to represent completion in scripture, as the seven days of the week represent a complete week. In the Mosaic law, there were various requirements of restitution for stealing (Exodus 21:33-22:15).

In other words, just because his circumstances seem reasonable to justify stealing does not disqualify him from having to face the consequences of his decisions. *He must give all the substance of his house*. The act will sink him further into poverty, compounding the problem rather than solving it. We might have empathy as to why the person did what they did, but they still did it, and must bear the consequences.

Embedded in this is the principle of rule of law. God made a cause-effect universe, and that universe reflects His laws. We ignore them to our peril. If we disbelieve gravity, we will still hit the ground. If we ignore moral laws, we will still bear the consequences.

We all can understand the circumstances of temptation. They may seem alluring or reasonable, but they hurt us in the end. We cannot give in to temptation and avoid their consequences. The thief has to face the consequences of their poor choice, but it can be restored. The debt can be repaid, and money can be re-earned. Such is the case with petty theft.

Compared to *the one who commits adultery with a woman* (vs 32). This person is described by Solomon as *lacking sense*. *He who would destroy himself does it*. The consequences for this path, this definitive choice, is more severe. You can't just pay back with your possessions (substance); it costs your character. You can't “repay seven times” and get your character back. You can't undo the broken trust, the wrecked relationships.

To commit adultery is to *destroy* yourself. Inferred here is a particular severity for sexual sin. This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul, who wrote:

“Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

(1 Corinthians 6:18)

To commit sexual sin is to harm our own bodies. Further, in this passage from 1 Corinthians 6, Paul asserts that joining oneself to a prostitute makes us “one” with her, and joins the Lord’s spirit with her. This means that adultery shatters fellowship in all the relationships most dear to us. All of which confirms Solomon’s assertion that *He who would commit adultery would destroy himself*.

Solomon expounds on the damage: *Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out* (vs 33). Some sins have greater consequences than others. The term *blotted out* likely refers to the remembrance and impact of the betrayal of trust relating to committing adultery. This breach of character will not fade away.

Solomon shows these two transgressions—stealing and adultery—both have consequences. But some consequences are more severe. What happens to us when we leave that which we were created for to choose the lesser way of wickedness is always negative. But adultery is a deep betrayal that leaves a permanent scar.

Why is this so? Because *jealousy enrages a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance* (vs 34). A major source of destruction will come from the woman’s husband.

Like much of Proverbs, this works on multiple levels. Imagine you are a man who finds out that another man has slept with your wife. It is a betrayal to the core, a perversion of something sacred to you. Compare that to if a starving man steals food from your pantry. One is much more significant than the other, even though both are violations.

You are much more likely to forgive the thief and, once he has repaid, may even grow to become friends with him. But the man who slept with your wife is going to be a target for *vengeance*. In Solomon’s era, we can imagine what that scenario might entail. The destruction might be physical death.

Using this human example, Solomon is showing us how God feels about our choices. Certain things we do disappoint Him. Others show that we have chosen a different path entirely. When Israel sinned against Him, they were breaking their covenant vow, to keep His commands, which they promised to keep (Exodus 19:8). This is analogous to a wedding vow.

Accordingly, God called Israel an adulteress for breaking its vow to Him (Hosea 1:2; Ezekiel 16:15). When New Testament believers are friendly with and follow the world, they similarly are said to be acting as adulterers and adulteresses (James 4:4).

The jealous husband of the wife you committed adultery with *will not accept any ransom nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts* (vs 35). Unlike with the stolen loaf of bread, the jealous husband will not be appeased. Perhaps he will only be satisfied if you are dead.

Solomon here gives his youthful students a clear and present deterrent from pursuing their pleasures without due consideration. In a moment of passion it might seem to make sense to commit adultery, but they need to make a better choice. Sin brings death as a consequence (Romans 6:23). And sexual sin brings self-destruction. Solomon desires that his students live with an investment mentality, sowing seeds that will bear fruit, rather than sowing seeds that will reap destruction (Galatians 6:8).

Our ongoing, daily choice is binary, to choose life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). And if we choose the way of wickedness, there is no trick to get us in the backdoor after the end has come. The consequence will be real.

The choices we make about what to do does not affect our familial identity. Our human parents are always our ancestors regardless of our choices. Similarly, God chose Israel as His people apart from their actions; He chose them because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:7). God's promises are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). God always kept Israel as His bride, even though she suffered severe consequences for her sins.

For New Testament believers, God is always faithful to save all who believe. He will never reject His children. To reject those whom He has saved would be to deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). But there are clear consequences for sin. God's wrath pours out on sin in this life, as He gives us over to the natural consequences of our flesh (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). There are also substantial consequences in the next life, as we can lose rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10).

It is ironic that Solomon has to implore his students to do what is in their own best interest. But it is a part of the human dilemma that we are often blind to that which is for our best. Scripture invites us to find what is true, believe it, live it, and benefit from it. God has our best interest at heart, and has laid out a path in which all who are willing can walk and prosper.

Biblical Text

³⁰ Men do not despise a thief if he steals

To satisfy himself when he is hungry;

³¹ But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold;

He must give all the substance of his house.

³² The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense;

He who would destroy himself does it.

³³ Wounds and disgrace he will find,

And his reproach will not be blotted out.

³⁴ For jealousy enrages a man,

And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

³⁵ He will not accept any ransom,

Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts.